

Naomi called at 12:01.



standuponit
 **standuponit**

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MOOD: quixotic

MUSIC: Katie Herzig - Hologram

Naomi called at 12:01. She started to apologize, but I told her not to. I know her. She wouldn't call me at home if she didn't have to. And anyway, I wasn't asleep.

"It's bad, Travis," was the next thing she said, and I realized that that apology hadn't been as much an apology as it had been a way to buy time. She was rattled. And that meant it *was* bad.

"Tell me where," I said. I was already halfway out the door.

"The Sutter place," Naomi said, and there was no one around so I didn't have to hide my wince. The Sutter place hadn't had any Sutters in it since 1992.

"There in ten," I said and hung up. Too much irony in the sheriff killing himself because he's trying to drive and talk on his damn cellphone at the same time.

I realized as I backed the truck out that I felt this weird sense of relief. Another moment, my headlights cutting sharp wedges out of the night, and I figured out why.

I could finally quit waiting for something bad to happen at the Sutter place.

The Sutters had been all over the history of Camber and of Clayton County, but by 1992, there'd just been Paul Sutter and his wife left. Childless, good citizens, donated to local charities, close friends of the mayor, yadda yadda. The sort of people who, if they'd still been around, would've called me *Sheriff* Villette, with just enough emphasis--not to be impolite, never that, but just enough to show they didn't think I'd ever be able to fill Sheriff Leland's shoes.

But they weren't around anymore. Rosalie Sutter had died in 1990, laryngeal cancer and it'd been ugly, and after that, Paul Sutter had

gotten a little . . . odd. I hadn't been here then, but I'd heard about it from Naomi and Ronnie and even from Sheriff Leland one night when he'd had maybe a little too much to drink. Paul Sutter had cut back his hours in his office first--not typical for a realtor, but he was past fifty and plenty wealthy for a widower with no children. But then he closed the office altogether, didn't try to sell it or anything. He let Darlene McCormick go with a severance package so generous that Darlene took a cruise through the Virgin Islands she was still talking about fifteen years later, which is even weirder if you know just how useless Darlene is in an office. He stopped going to football games, quit the bridge club he'd been playing in since before he got married. He stopped going to church. At first, Sheriff Leland told me, he'd talk to people who came to the house, although he wouldn't explain himself or even agree to the suggestion that there was anything wrong. But those conversations got shorter and shorter, and then he'd stopped answering the door. "And what could I do?" Sheriff Leland had said blearily. "Ain't no crime to prefer your own company, and he'd show himself at the window if I hollered long enough. He swore he was fine, he'd got food laid in, and all he wanted was for the whole damn town to leave him alone. So I did what he wanted. I left him alone." It was mid-September 1992, a year and a half after Rosalie Sutter's death, when Ronnie remarked to the sheriff that it sure had been a long time since anyone had sighted Paul Sutter, and how much food could he have stored in his house anyway? They went to the house, got no answer no matter how much they knocked and hollered, finally broke the door down. They found Paul Sutter in the bedroom, lying in his bed as tidy as if Peabody and Hamms the undertakers had laid him out themselves. Doc Gordon's best guess was that he'd starved to death three months previously.

So that was the Sutter place. Nobody'd been able to shift it, so it just sat there year after year, getting more rundown and overgrown--more and more the sort of place where bad things happened. The locals said it was haunted, of course, but it wasn't that, even though I knew why they said it--why no one would buy it, even out-of-towners who'd never heard of Paul Sutter. It just felt wrong, the way some places just do. And those are the places where the dark gets in.

Naomi was waiting for me at the foot of the driveway. She looked as rattled as she'd sounded, and I thought of the things I'd seen Naomi handle without turning a hair and felt pretty rattled myself.

"It's bad, Travis," she said as I got out of the truck, just like she'd

said on the phone.

"Take it from the top," I said. "For starters, what are you doing out here anyway?"

"Mrs. Mitchell," Naomi said. I rolled my eyes, and Naomi snorted in that way she has when she doesn't think she should laugh, and I think we were both glad of a scrap of normality. Mrs. Mitchell spent her life minding other people's business; a good thirty percent of the calls we got in a normal month were Mrs. Mitchell, panting to share the "suspicious" thing she'd just seen.

But Naomi sobered again. "This was a little different, though. She said her neighbor's girl--Lizzie Hewett--saw a light at the Sutter place coming home from a study date, and she was too scared to call herself."

Lizzie Hewett was a sweet-faced high school junior, co-captain of the cross country team. I remembered that she herself preferred to go by Liz.

"So I said I'd swing by. And what with one thing and another, this was the fastest I could get out here. Wasn't no lights, but Lizzie wouldn't make something like that up. So I went up to check." Naomi stopped and hugged herself, as if it were cold.

"And?" I said, as easy as I could.

Naomi opened her mouth, then closed it again, shaking her head. "I thought I could just report it, but I can't. C'mon. Come see for yourself."

So I followed her and her Maglite up the driveway and around to the back of the house, where the sliding glass door was broken. By a tree branch, not by a human being, but it was a completely horrible non-surprise that somebody would see the opportunity and use it.

"That's how they got in," Naomi said.

"They?"

"In a minute, sheriff." Naomi only calls me "sheriff" when she thinks I deserve it--when I'm being stupid or an asshole. So I shut my mouth and followed her some more, careful of the glass.

The rooms were all empty except for the wall-to-wall carpeting that had been plush once-upon-a-time and now just looked ridiculous. And sinister, too, but I told myself not to be stupid--until we got upstairs to the master bedroom, and then I figured I could be as stupid and melodramatic as I wanted, because the blood was fucking *everywhere*.

The body was in the middle of the room, lying on its back; its arms were crooked up with the hands by the shoulders. There was a fan of blood across the beige carpet, like the poor bastard had staggered in a half-circle before he went down, and then a nauseatingly thick pool under the body's head and shoulders. And then from the fan of blood coming toward where we were standing in the doorway . . .

Footprints.

Human footprints.

Sneakerprints, in point of fact, and not big ones.

And even under all that blood, I could see the body was wearing a letter jacket.

"Oh fuck," I said, because it was Naomi and I didn't have to watch myself, and besides, she'd earned it. It's a mean trick, hanging somebody out to dry by playing it cool, and a lot of law enforcement in Clayton County, I'd learned, was about not being mean.

And Naomi nodded hard, almost like a muscle spasm or something, and said, "Can you tell who it is?"

We both knew all the kids at Clayton County High School by sight, but it was hard to match any of that up with this kid with his throat ripped out and blood as thick as paint on his face. I thought for a moment about going closer, but then I gave myself a good hard mental smack and got out my phone. "We'll find out soon enough," I said. I had Doc Gordon on autodial.

Me and Naomi and Ronnie are all the law there is in Clayton County, and we go to those continuing education conferences and learn what we can about crime scenes and forensics and what to do and what not to do, which pretty much boils down to "take pictures of everything ever" and "don't touch anything with your bare hands even so." Ronnie's good with the camera--and it

helps, me and Naomi and Ronnie being all the law there is in Clayton County, for there to be something that's Ronnie's special purview, instead of me and Naomi doing it all faster and better and smarter--so I called him, too, and he took pictures and Doc Gordon took samples or specimens or whatever you call it, and Naomi and I measured the fuck out of those footprints. Either a girl or a younger boy, and whoever it was, they'd stopped and wiped their feet before they left the bedroom, which suggested a degree of cool-headedness that made both Naomi and me highly unhappy.

And then Doc Gordon sighed and straightened up and said, "Sheriff?"

"Whatcha got?"

Doc Gordon's mid-fifties, skinny and balding and kind of lawyerish to look at, but he was the guy took the bullet out of my leg the time Chip Priddy got liquored up and shot the hell out of his ex-wife's Datsun, and I couldn't have asked for anybody better. He said, "It's Vernon Weatherbee."

And Naomi and I looked at each other and we didn't need to say it. Because along with the horror and the tragedy and the fucked-uppedness of it all, we now had Marion Weatherbee to deal with, and that was enough to strip anybody's gears.

So when we were done with the Sutter place and what was left of Vernon Weatherbee, Naomi went to notify Dale and Marion Weatherbee--I leave bad news to her as much as I can, because she's better at it, and she takes it out in trade by making me babysit the drunks at Homecoming--and I went the other, back to the department to drink coffee and and write this all out and wait for morning so I can go down to Clayton County High School and start asking questions.

TAGS: [down the rabbit hole](#)



This looks like a
good idea.

...

This.

...

Little guy's not
bad.

Gotta teach RHex
to smear.

16 comments

thank you



alumiere

January 27 2009, 17:07:56 UTC COLLAPSE

wow - this is beautifully written and creepy

villette - a cousin or some such of chaz's?



Re: thank you



standuponit

January 27 2009, 17:41:28 UTC COLLAPSE

What? My blog! It's all about me!

[[[[Google "livejournal down the rabbit hole day" for context. Travis is your usual Villette's middle name.
Normal service will resume at midnight.]]]]

Re: thank you



alumiere

January 27 2009, 19:03:12 UTC COLLAPSE

doh - silly rabbit, my bad (it's not tomorrow for me yet)

Re: thank you



blackcoat

January 27 2009, 19:17:44 UTC COLLAPSE

Named for the Colonel or the AFB?

<-- Was named for the AFB, pissing off his grandad something fierce. After all, Col. Travis likely killed an ancestor of ours whilst said ancestor was charging the Alamo...



Re: thank you



standuponit

January 27 2009, 19:26:10 UTC COLLAPSE

You know? I haven't the foggiest where my names come from. I never got a chance to ask.

Re: thank you


 **blackcoat**

January 27 2009, 19:30:37 UTC COLLAPSE

Oh. Uhh..sorry, I didn't know your parents had passed.



Re: thank you

 **standuponit**

January 27 2009, 19:43:05 UTC COLLAPSE

It's okay. Not like it's printed on my forehead, after all, even if you could see me.

And my mom's been gone a long time now. Although sometimes I still kind of feel her around, you know? (Not that I'm religious.)

Re: thank you

 **blackcoat**

January 27 2009, 20:15:17 UTC COLLAPSE

Yes, I know exactly what you're talking about.

Well, I get to blame mine on Catholicism. ;-)

Also..odd to read a story with the main character name of Travis. It's a rare enough name that I can't disassociate it with myself as well as someone named, oh, John for instance.



Re: thank you

 **standuponit**

January 27 2009, 19:26:46 UTC COLLAPSE

...but my mom was from Texas.

Re: thank you

 **blackcoat**

January 27 2009, 21:12:48 UTC COLLAPSE

Depending on how good at etymology your mother was, she might have just had a sense of humor.

Your last name means small town..Travis is bridge or a crossroads, chaz (charles) is Strong...

So you're a strong bridge in a small town. :)


 **edschweppe**

January 27 2009, 19:47:41 UTC COLLAPSE

Whoa. Cool stuff. Although a high school called "CCHS" slightly weirds me out, since that was the acronym for **my** high school, way back when.


And ... Travis, huh? Were you named after Travis McGee, by any chance?



 [standuponit](#)

[January 27 2009, 19:51:04 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

Your guess is as good as mine. See upthread.

 [sprrwhwk](#)


[January 28 2009, 02:06:38 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

I just got back to LiveJournal after a day at work, which meant I started somewhere in the middle of your story, and I hadn't heard about Down the Rabbit Hole Day at all, so I thought this was about you RL work. (But if so, why wasn't it friendslocked? And the posts read like a story, and there were sure a lot of them, but on the other hand, I dunno jack about your work, besides that you work in law enforcement (which is probably for the best, really). And we haven't heard a lot from you lately. And, well, the names were right, so maybe, just maybe, you'd had an early-mid-life crisis and become a small-town sheriff?)


At any rate, you had me going for a while. Relieved though I am to find out that it's fiction, it's damn good fiction, and I'm curious to see how it ends. You should try your hand at telling stories more often. :-)

 [delurker](#)

[January 28 2009, 10:23:13 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

Here via  [sartoris](#), and glad I did read this - it was very enjoyable.



 [standuponit](#)

[January 28 2009, 12:47:16 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

Thank you!

 [marsdejathoris](#)

[January 29 2009, 19:15:15 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

Cool story- here from Truepenny's LJ, and I really enjoyed this. Also, my first name is Travis. I'm a girl. :) (It's a family name, my great-grandmother's maiden name. No relation to the Colonel, I don't think.)

This looks like a
good idea.

...

This.

...

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